1:Williams E,G-5 (1923-1925) 1930
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The Mambare and Kumusi are navigable by launch, the latter as far as Bogi, where in mining days the stores used to be put ashore some fifty-five miles from the mouth. But here already the flow of the stream is too strong for native transport, and canoes are rarely seen among the people of the neighbourhood.

While the Mambare and Kumusi are both powerful and impressive rivers they do not possess the same charm as the lesser Gira and Opi. Of the Gira Sir Wm. MacGregor, having admired the landscape of scattered hills and the elevated and fertile banks with their frequent villages, concluded that it was 'the most populous and certainly by far the most pleasant of our north-east coast rivers'.[1]

Sir George Le Hunte was sufficiently charmed by the lower Opi to write:

> 'I do not recollect ever being on a more beautiful stream. The banks lined now with the handsome dark-leaved nipa palms springing from the water, now with the spreading sago palm with its curious candelabra-shaped flowers rising straight above it, here a village landing-place with a group of tall graceful areca palms, across which a leaning cocoanut would curve above a cluster of red and golden crotons. . . . The water a deep brown, on which the reflections were so vivid that it was sometimes difficult to distinguish the real from the image. . . .'[2]

Had it been possible for Sir George to ascend the river further than 'about six miles', he would have found a strong flowing stream whose rocky bed is visible through its swift transparency, and which is alternately overshadowed by tall forest or exposed to the sunshine in some broad expanse of rapids; and he might well have been tempted to write with equal vividness and still more enthusiasm.

The northern rivers, however, do not always bear this idyllic aspect. They are subject to sudden rise, and the clear stream of yesterday is transformed overnight into a brown swirling flood, sweeping down masses of forest wreckage and rising over its banks to cover the surrounding country. At such a time it is hardly possible to stir abroad except on canoes or rafts, and some time after the subsidence of the water one may not be surprised to find one of these stranded high and dry among the trees.

[1] *Annual Report*, 1896–7, p. 31. [2] *Annual Report*, 1898–9, p. 21.

1:Williams E,G-5 (1923-1925) 1930
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133 731 The experience of a Government official in the early days will show to what extent these floods may go:

'From the date of our arrival (Oct. 12) until the end of May we had one long series of floods in the Mambare River. Scarcely a week passed without a flood, and sometimes we had five or six consecutively at night. On six or eight occasions the floods were exceptionally heavy, and the water rose from two to three feet above the level of the banks. The highest ground is immediately adjacent to the river, for in the forests a short distance back the water was many times 6 and 8 feet deep.' [1]

The rapidity with which the flood-waters sink is somewhat surprising when we consider the very gradual fall of the ground. Sometimes, it appears, the damage to native gardens may be serious, but this is not often so; and the pile-built village, although often enough within reach of the flood, sustains no permanent injury.

The Seasons

132 The floods belong to the 'North-West' season, i.e. they occur roughly speaking between October and March, when the north-west monsoon is blowing. This is the period of greater rainfall throughout the territory.

Reports published in 1922 give the following results for the three Government stations in the Northern Division.[2]

Station.	*Period.*	*Mean Rainfall (Annual).*	*Three Wettest Months.*
Buna	12 years	113 in.	Nov., Dec., Jan.
Kokoda	12 „	131 „	Nov., Jan., Feb.
Ioma	11 „	161 „	Dec., Jan., Mar.

The difference between the 'North-West' and the 'South-East' seasons is fairly well marked, though it is one of rain, temperature, and humidity, rather than one of wind, as the names would imply. Whatever winds may fly overhead there is an almost dreary stillness in the forests of the plain,

[1] John Green, Government Agent, in *Annual Report*, 1895–6, p. 77. The writer adds: 'The natives during the heavy floods had to sleep in their canoes.' It may be remarked that such a situation would be entirely exceptional, for the flood-water very rarely reaches the floor-level of the house.

[2] *Annual Report*, 1921–2, p. 87.

1:Williams E,G-5 (1923-1925) 1930
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varied, indeed, by occasional squalls that may do considerable damage among the luxuriant but flimsy vegetation. 132

The South-East season is perceptibly drier and much more pleasant than the North-West. This becomes especially apparent to the traveller who in the former season can make a good pace over excellent native tracks, but in the latter must do more than a little wading. A former *Annual Report* gives the following account of the Aiga country: 'The track between Bogi and Tamata has the reputation of being in bad weather the worst in the Possession. The greater part of it passes through flat country, intersected by sluggish creeks and pandanus swamps. After heavy rain it is flooded for miles waist deep.'[1] One may reasonably doubt whether the Aiga country is often deserving of this description; but making allowance for a little pardonable exaggeration on the part of one who had evidently met with unpleasant conditions, we may take his word for it that in bad weather the tracks are very wet. 132 487

The contrast afforded by the drier months of 'winter' may be striking. Sometimes a long spell of sunny rainless weather, with refreshing, almost chilly, nights may lead to a serious dearth of food, and compel the natives to supplement their diet with a variety of leaves, roots, and fern-fronds from the bush. Although such scarcity never reaches the point of famine it may nevertheless be serious enough. The drought has in fact far more terrors for the Orokaiva than the destructive flood. 132 731

Conditions of temperature remain fairly equable. The following are figures for the official year, 1924–5: 132

Station.	*Dry Therm.*	*Wet Therm.*	*Maximum.*	*Minimum.*
Buna	82·2	77·5	87·3	68·4
Kokoda	74·5	72·3	88·5	67·3
Ioma	77·4	74·4	91·5	72·9

Vegetation

By far the greater part of the Northern Division is covered by forest. Some of this has at one time or another been 137

[1] *Annual Report*, 1904–5, p. 5.

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
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244 482 be accompanied by her husband they will probably return together about noon, he with his axe, knife, and spears over his shoulders, she, a few paces behind, bending forward under a weight of taro, greens, and firewood, her immensely distended string bag hanging over her back from a band across her sweating forehead, while the counter-balance of a sleeping baby in another string bag may hang before her. A small prick-eared [231] dog trots alongside, and as the larger and more aggressive animal that accompanies the white man comes into view, she will (to avoid the possibility of conflict) contrive in some manner to sink down and gather the extra burden of a dog into her arms.

244 Replanting goes on from time to time, and the successive plots may be marked off by log boundaries (*tani*). The period of greatest activity is perhaps about the beginning of the North-West season, when more abundant rain can be counted on, and when the whole clan may be engaged in planting out the offsets, or *bere*. But there is no seasonable rule, and *bere* may be transplanted into damp localities in the middle of a dry spell. Indeed, one man complained that a term of three months in the district jail had coincided with such a dry spell, and he had actually lost all his offsets for lack of transplanting.

251 [131] The fact that there is never real famine and that scarcity is a rare thing, brings about an attitude of mind which we might call improvidence. Yams are stored where they are grown; so also are *Tauga* nuts and *Puga*. But the two former are not common except in the south of the Division. Beyond these, and of course the coconut, the native puts by no vegetable food. When a feast 251 is preparing, the taro will be gathered in great quantities 754 and stacked on platforms. Some is eaten at the feast, some distributed with a great display of cordiality to the guests, who take it home. There is no method of preserving taro, and sometimes, when a feast is for any reason delayed, a great deal of food may deteriorate and become inedible.